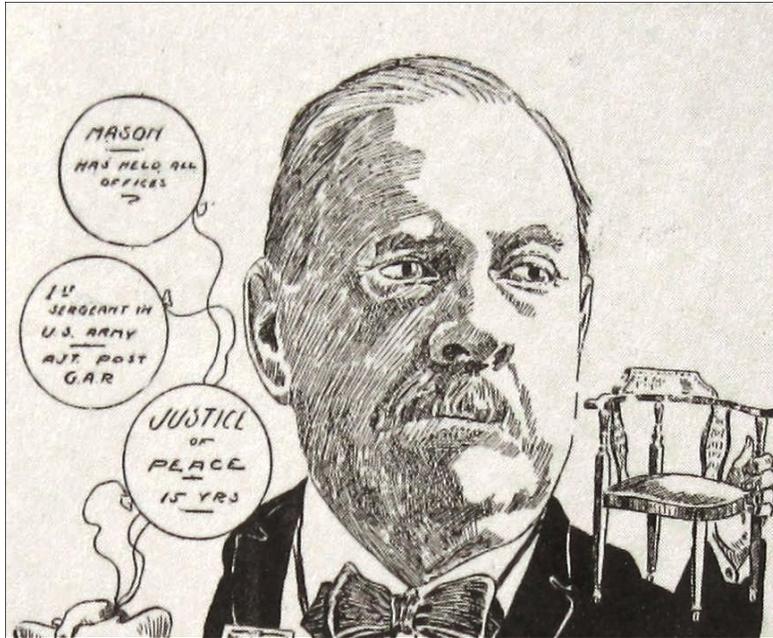


James H Barrows



In this partial copy of a Barrows caricature he holds his trademark chair and the balloons summarize his career. A Mason who had held all of the offices, 1st Sergeant in U.S. Army, Post Adjutant, G.A.R. and Justice of the Peace, 15 years.

James H. Barrows (1832-1909): A group of Bethel's leading businessmen of the 1886 era invited James Barrows to organize and run a chair manufacturing plant in Bethel similar to what he had done in West Paris. The Kimball Chair Co. had moved to West Paris from New York. This company seemed to absorb most of the manufacturing resources available in West Paris. Seeing his support erode in West Paris, Barrows decided to pursue offers from unnamed parties in Bethel. It was this situation that resulted in Bethel voting to invest in public works – building the Bethel chair factory.

Mr. Barrows was born in Greenwood, Maine, in 1832. He first married Mary Fuller of Paris, who died several years ago. Later he married Mary A. Young. Early in life he became identified with the manufacture of chairs and continued this business up to within a year of his death. He was actively engaged in business during his entire life, and many years ago made chairs at Snow Falls, in Paris, and later was in the same business in West Paris for 26 years.

In the summer of 1886, James Barrows, chair manufacturer from West Paris who had been in business with partner Hannibal Brown - circa 1872 to 1886 -proposed leasing a plant at Bethel if the town would erect a suitable building. "History of Paris, Maine up to 1880." From the Journals: 1887: negotiated with the selectmen to obtain another \$500 to install steam heat – received authority to lease the new building - famous Shaker Chairs of J. H. Barrows make are taking shape - men are seeking employment at

Bethel having been thrown out of work at the J. H. Barrows plant in West Paris since the finishing operation moved to New York. Mr. Barrows has rented the Charles Harris store for a furnishing [finishing] shop. 1888: the Chair Company has recently installed a dowel lathe - birch into dowels. 1889: received from J. H. Barrows for rent (chair factory) from August 1, 1887 to August 1, 1888: \$595.00. 1891: our chair company has reported that July best month ever made since the company was organized.

The following letter which Mr. Barrows wrote in rebuttal to a previous letter to the Oxford Advertiser explains his business prior to coming to Bethel. I also tells about his perspective of manufacturing Shaker chairs.

History Corrected

“In the Advertiser of July 9th I find a labored and lengthy article purporting to give a history of the Shaker chair business in this town but really for the sole purpose of throwing mud and in some way injuring me by belittling my business. “

Apparently after some Bethel citizens had invited Barrows to establish a chair manufacturing plant at Bethel, what Barrows described as a malicious letter was sent to parties in Bethel. This letter supposed was a perceived attempt to deter Bethel from further supporting Barrows.

The letter to Bethel and the letter to the Advertiser was seen by Barrows as attempts to prevent Barrows from locating a plant in Bethel. Barrows goes on to point out that the writer of the July 9th letter had on other occasions attempted to injure him in some way.

James Swan made about three dozen chairs with the help of A.L. Pratt in 1838, not 1835. Wood turning machinery was not put in at South Woodstock until 1845 – six years after Swan had gone west. Ellingwood went to New Hampshire to make chairs instead of in South Woodstock. Ellingwood enlisted in the 14th New Hampshire regiment.

Barrows had been making chairs at West Paris since 1873. In 1878 Barrows got out a full entirely new line of chairs from any being made and put them on the market calling them the “Shaker Chair”. This was the first time the name “Shaker” was applied to chairs in this state or any other so far as I know.

“These chairs have had a very large sale. And the fact that I have made about \$10,000 a year, and that they are being used in nearly one-half of the States in the Union as well in Canada and the Provinces, and are being introduced in England with the prospect of a large sale would indicate that the business is not on quite such a small scale as the writer of modern history would have people believe.

The Bethel Journals-Bethel Maine History-James Barrows

“Coming down to the year 1883 we find the new history has it that the citizens built a new building 38 x 100 for J. Wayland Kimball to accommodate his increasing business. ..the facts are that this building called the new chair factory was built for me and the express agreement and understanding in writing that I should lease the same for ten years, and except for my own personal efforts and means, would never have been built, I being the largest stockholder in the enterprise. “

When the strained imagination of the writer comes down to the time that it was said that the Shaker chair must go there are more facts to consider.

When the writer said that Mr. Kimball not wishing to injure Mr. Barrows offered him ruminative wages to stay and oversee his work. The fact is that Mr. Kimball made me no offer whatsoever. Instead Kimball allegedly owed Barrows \$2,000 and had dodged Barrows' efforts to collect.

“The fact remains that I (Barrows) pay more tax in Paris than all the Kimball's, Browns and Adams combined.”

“ In conclusion I (Barrows) wish to say that I shall doubtless locate in the town of Bethel, and intend to make a full line of “Shakers”, Antiques and Novelties in chairs, and shall put them on the market at reasonable prices, unless this great historical writer should convince the world that I have gone out of it for good.”

J.H. Barrows.

Caring for his employees, Mr. Barrows annually made arrangements for his entire factory crew and their families to travel to Portland for a picnic and excursion around the Islands.

In December 1891, Mary Barrows, wife of Mr. J.H. Barrows, died at age 53 in Augusta - funeral in Bethel on December 24th - interment in West Paris.

The Oxford County Citizen, Bethel, Maine April 22, 1909 reported it is with feelings of sadness and regret that we announce the death of our esteemed fellow townsman, James H. Barrows, who passed away Tuesday afternoon, April 20, at the Eye and Ear Infirmary in Portland. His daughter, Mrs. Frank H. Young, of Bethel was with him at the time of his death.

For many years, while at Paris he served as a trial justice and he also held that position at the time of his death. At the outbreak of the Civil War he entered the service as a member of Company F. 23rd Maine Volunteers. He was an active member of Brown Post, G.A. R. of Bethel, and a Mason of good standing. In him there has gone from our

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midst an esteemed and highly respected man, a patriotic and helpful citizen, a kind and sympathetic friend. A man of high ideals and noble impulses, he was always ready to help with his time and personal service in all progressive movements, business, social, educational and religious. He was a man of earnest convictions, unyielding and unconquerable and always a devoted advocate of the highest and best in life.

He was a Republican in politics and very active member and leader of the Bethel Universalist Church and Oxford Universalist Association of which he was president for many years. He had been superintendent of the Sunday School at Bethel.

His funeral was at the Bethel Universalist Church conducted under the auspices of the Masons.

Information for this profile—Oxford County newspapers. Illustration copied from the Illustrated History of Bethel, Maine by Randall H. Bennett.